

THE 50+ Connection

NEWS and EVENTS from the
Howard County Office on Aging and Independence

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Eight Steps to Build a Personalized, Healthy Meal

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Developing a healthful eating pattern is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. The key is tailoring your favorite foods to meet your individual nutrient needs. In March, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (eatright.org) focuses attention on healthful eating through National Nutrition Month®. This year's theme — Personalize Your Plate — promotes creating nutritious meals to meet individuals' cultural and personal food preferences.



Think of each meal as a building block to healthy eating. Include all food groups throughout the day. Make fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein foods part of your daily meals and snacks. Limit added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.

Follow These Eight Steps to Personalize Your Plate

#1 — Make half your plate fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are full of nutrients that support good health. Choose colorful fruits and red, orange, and dark-green vegetables such as tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli.

#2 — Include whole grains. Make at least half your grains whole grains. Look for the words "100% whole grain" on the food label. Whole grains provide more nutrients, like fiber, than refined grains (such as white bread and rice).

#3 — Don't forget the dairy. Complete your meal with a cup of fat-free or low-fat milk. You will get the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole or 2% milk with fewer calories. Don't drink milk? Try a milk alternative (like almond milk) or include low-fat yogurt in your meal or snack.

#4 — Add lean protein. Choose protein foods like lean beef, pork, chicken, or turkey, and eggs, nuts, beans, or tofu. At least twice a week, try to make seafood the protein on your plate.

#5 — Avoid adding extra fats to foods. Using heavy gravies, sauces, or butter will add fat and calories to otherwise healthy choices. Try steamed broccoli with a sprinkling of low-fat parmesan cheese or a squeeze of lemon to enhance the flavor.

#6 — Take control of your food. Eat at home more often so you know exactly what you are eating. If you eat out, check and compare the nutrition information. Choose options that are lower in calories, saturated fat and sodium.

#7 — Get creative in the kitchen. Try adding in more veggies that add new flavors and textures to your meals. Experiment with new foods you've never tried before, like mango, lentils, quinoa, or kale. You may find a new favorite! Trade new recipes with friends or find them online.

#8 — Satisfy your sweet tooth in a healthy way. Indulge with fresh fruit salad or a fruit parfait made with yogurt. For a hot dessert, bake apples and top with cinnamon.

Do You Need a Personalized Nutrition Plan?

Remember, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to your health. We are all unique with different bodies, goals, backgrounds, and tastes!

OAI's Registered Dietitian, Carmen Roberts, is available for virtual nutrition consultations via phone or videoconference each month. During this free, 30-minute session, Roberts can answer your questions about diet, nutrition and the impact of food on your health, as well as address your particular health or nutrition concerns.

Ready to get started on a healthier path through nutrition? Register for a free virtual nutrition consultation at <https://bit.ly/3oKvYQe>.

A Message from Howard County Executive Calvin Ball



This month, hope is on the horizon.

With vaccines actively being distributed, and warmer weather on its way, we can all see the end of this pandemic is closer than it has been in months. Howard County has continued to quickly vaccinate as many people as our supply allows. Our Health Department has consistently been one of the most efficient in the State, distributing approximately 100% of vaccine within a week of receiving doses. We are continuing our work with Howard County General Hospital to get even more vaccine out to more of our community members even faster. Getting a vaccine is the key to ending this pandemic. Be sure to help inform your family, friends, and neighbors about the vaccine and how they can sign-up. If you are 65 or older and have not already received your vaccine or signed up to receive one, please pre-register with our Health Department to find an appointment by calling 410-313-6284 or at vaccine.howardcountymd.gov. Alternatively, you can look for a vaccination appointment throughout Maryland at marylandvax.org. While there is still much work to do, and our efforts to wear masks and keep our distance must continue, we are making more progress than ever before.

With Spring just around the corner and with a renewed focus on health and wellness, it's a great time to get more active, eat better, and get more fresh air and sunshine. Outdoor activities continue to be lower risk activities amid the pandemic, and a wonderful way to break up any winter blues. As challenging as this past year has been, we still need to remember to take time for ourselves, whether that means a long walk around the neighborhood, or preparing a meal while (virtually) chatting with friends. This month, there is a lot to look forward to, so let's stick together, stay COVID safe, and stay hopeful for brighter tomorrows for all.

OAI Nutrition Team Welcomes Alison Gerber

Meet Alison Gerber, the Office on Aging and Independence's (OAI) new Nutrition Program Manager. In her new role with OAI's Health Promotion and Nutrition team, Gerber oversees Howard County's nutrition services which aim to reduce food insecurity, promote socialization, and maintain the independence of older adults. Programs under her direction include the Grab & Go meal distribution, congregate meals, home delivered meals, and nutrition education.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been challenged to ensure food security for older adults through Howard County," says Division Manager Courtney Barkley. "Access to healthy food options is vital to maintain physical and mental health and well-being, especially in times of extreme need. Alison's skills and experience are a great addition to the Health Promotion and Nutrition team and will benefit our community."

As a Registered Dietitian with over 13 years of experience working in clinical and community settings with diverse populations, Gerber finds working with older adults to be emotionally rewarding and mentally stimulating. "I always learn something new when I engage with older

adults, and gain new perspectives," she says. As the Nutrition Program Manager, Gerber hopes to expand the Grab & Go restaurant initiative and attract new participants to OAI's existing nutrition programs.

Gerber holds a B.S. in Nutritional Science from Penn State University and an M.S. in Nutrition from Long Island University. While in Boston, she managed the nutrition team for a nonprofit home-delivered meals program and coordinated hundreds of nutrition education classes to low-income families. Upon moving back to the DC area, she ran the operations at a local food bank and led the SNAP-Ed team at the University of the District of Columbia. In her free time, Alison enjoys playing with her two-year old son, traveling, and staying active outdoors.



Alison Gerber, B.S., M.S.



An initiative of the Howard County Commission for Women (CFW), the "So She Did" Spotlight Series highlights women making positive changes throughout the county to promote the economic, social and political equality of women. "So She Did" is part of a well-known quote — "She believed she could. So she did." — which expresses the belief that a determined woman can do anything she sets her mind to.

Throughout March — National Women's History Month — Howard County women who exemplify this philosophy will be featured on the Commission's Facebook page (www.Facebook.com/HoCoCFW). "Through the 'So She Did' social media campaign, the Commission hopes to focus attention on the women in our community who empower equity through volunteerism, education, public service, entrepreneurship, or mentoring," says Rhonda Jones, chair of the Commission for Women.

This initiative will culminate with a virtual celebration on Monday, March 29, honoring the women featured throughout the month, and will include comments from the County Executive and members of the Commission for Women. Each of the honorees will receive a letter of recognition from the Commission and a token of recognition. To join in the celebration, visit www.howardcountymd.gov/CFW for details.

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WEAR YOUR MASK & StayCOVIDSafe

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive

Wearing a mask is one of the most effective ways to protect yourself and those around you from COVID-19. A mask order is in effect in Maryland, and must be worn in public areas.

BE SURE TO:

- ☒ Cover your nose and mouth
- ☒ Wash your mask after use
- ☒ Avoid touching the outside of your mask